Touhou Aodamo: Infinite Loops in Eastern Wonderland (The Infinite Loops of Gensokyo)

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by Wookywok

Summary

Reimu never asked to be trapped in a time loop, subjected to the whims of a dying god-tree, and at the forefront of all the bullshit the multiverse has to offer – but if there's one thing Reimu Hakurei is used to, it's having great responsibility hefted onto her without her consent.

Notes

After four years since we first floated the possibility around, endless hours of discussion and arguments, innumerable tangents, and one channel made on the ILP Discord because we wouldn't shut up about it... it's here.

If you just walked in here randomly like I walk into the kitchen at 3 AM looking for cheese, look to the Indie Loops thread on Spacebattles for answers, located here: https://forums.spacebattles.com/threads/indie-games-infinite-loops.329956/

But to all the zero people who were eagerly awaiting it, it's here. The Touhou Loops Compilation. On AO3.

Where doing it man.

Where making it hapen.

1.0: Introduction (A Snarky, Overblown History of Yggdrasil) *by Wookywok*

[You'll see which loops are involved in each snip in these brackets!]

Once upon a time, an endless sea of infinities ago, there was a tree named Yggdrasil.

This tree was kind of special – you see, it was also divine. And a supercomputer. And also contained *every universe to ever exist ever* within its branches . So this tree was fairly important, and was tended to by the Administrators: the various deities of mythology, from Zeus and Thor, to Ameterasu and Horus. And that's how it went, for countless eons upon eons.

Then, about a few quadrillion years ago, *it* happened.

Nobody knows what happened, and nobody ever will. Maybe it was a virus in Yggdrasil's systems. Maybe someone misplaced a semicolon. Maybe the Orks finally found enough dakka. But whatever it was, it messed Yggdrasil up something *fierce.* So fierce, that it nearly died completely, taking down the multiverse with it – and in an effort to save it, the Admins were faced with a nasty Morton's Fork.

You see, if Yggdrasil was just left running to simulate every universe, it wouldn't have the processing power to do so, and the tree would continue to degrade until it shriveled up and died. But if the Admins put the universes into temporal stasis, Yggdrasil's already broken memory of those universes would atrophy further – and so the tree would continue to degrade until it shriveled up and died. So the admins were left with no options but to take a third option.

They rebooted the tree in safe mode, placing several branches of Yggdrasil into time loops.

For the plan to work, each activated loop needed (at least) one "Anchor" – someone who always remembered they were in a time loop, and the events of their previous loops (or, in looper jargon, someone to always be "Awake".) However, since being an Anchor relies on

not completely losing it, more people from each loop were usually picked as “Loopers” – people who were at least *sometimes* Awake, in order to “anchor the Anchor” with much-needed socialization and relatability. (This isn’t to say that loopers are entirely sane, though – ennui is the enemy of mental stability, and a healthy level of loco is the enemy of ennui.)

To mitigate Loopers and Anchors from going insane locked down in a single universe forever, the Admins allowed Yggdrasil to occasionally get mixed up. In Variant Loops, details, from small imperceptible things to massive genre-changing twists, were changed. In Fused Loops, the Tree temporarily forgot that multiple universes were… well, multiple universes, allowing Loopers from two branches to interact and socialize. And those loopers passed on techniques to do incredible things to mitigate Loopers’ natural excess power buildup – ways to carry objects between loops, ways to keep skills and abilities obtained from other worlds, ways to alert other loopers that they were not alone.

As the progress of repairs on Yggdrasil slowly ambles along, ETA Infinity, more and more of Yggdrasil’s uncountable branches are Activated to join an ever-growing community of Loopers. And after a very notable hiccup in the repair process, one world was selected to control the damage – a world like many others, except for one little magically-sealed pocket of fantasy called Gensokyo.

These are their stories.

DUN-DUN.

1.1: Fantasy Reset *by Mercurial Wilting*

[Touhou]

When Reimu awoke, it was to something strange. An innate sense of wrongness that emanated from the barrier in waves. The strength of that feeling made her uneasy. Yukari would have fixed the barrier if something was wrong with it, right? And failing that, Yukari would have come to wake Reimu up if her assistance was required.

If there was trouble out there, and Yukari hasn’t noticed yet, then something has gone horribly wrong out there.

Reimu was halfway through wrapping the bandages around herself before realizing that she didn't actually need them. She'd... shrunk. Scratch that, her body was back to the way it was when she was 9. Complete with the…

" *The purple hair* ," she realized as she brushed back a lock of the cursed hair. She could've sworn she had gotten rid of that a long time ago, with that damned potion accident.

Her train of thought was interrupted when a tremendous ***CRASH*** rumbled throughout the Shrine. Reimu hurriedly finished throwing on the rest of her clothes before rushing out of her… door…

"WHAT!?"

There was no longer a door. Instead, there was a large splinter that was still half-way attached to the wall next to it. Which was also destroyed.

She could think about why she seemed to be in the past later. For now, there was an Angel in Hell that needed a good exterminating. Maybe she'll run into who messed with the barrier along the way.

1.2: What the Pandemonium *by Mercurial Wilting*

[Touhou]

Reimu was sitting underneath her Kotatsu, once again sipping tea. Going back in time was disorientating, but helpful. Most incidents were solved in record time now, and Reimu knowing the patterns beforehand made it leagues easier to dodge bullets.

But now, she was in the two-year lull before Remilia got cranky, and Reimu *still* didn't have a single lead about what's going on. As best as she could tell, it was as if time reset after beating Okina. The last thing she remembered was the Party that was started by Marisa and attended by… Well, the rest of Gensokyo.

Marisa looked confused when Reimu asked about it. She only said that "You're starting to sound as crazy as Miss Mima, ze! You sure your head's okay from that last incident?"

Which, in all fairness, wasn't entirely an inappropriate reaction. The thought of all of this just being a fever dream crossed her mind, until the encounter with Shinki.

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"I knew you would come, Shrine maiden of Hakurei. I could see it in your heart."

Reimu readied her Gohei. "It's my duty, Grand Divinity."

"Your duty, you say?" Shinki's eyes flashed from their normal blue to a deep purple. "And yet you've already solved this incident once before, yes?"

Reimu froze. "It felt like a dream," she whispered in a low voice.

Shinki laughed, a strangely mirthful giggling that grated on Reimu's nerves. "Oh, little Shrine Maiden, it is most definitely not a dream."

A door to the chambers suddenly burst open. "Lady Shinki!"

Shinki immediately swiped out an arm. "Stand down, Yumeko. This Shrine Maiden has already defeated us, once before."

Yumeko looked dreadfully confused, responding with “I- er, Yes, Lady Shinki,” before stumbling back through the door she came. As Reimu would later find out, she went off to find a hard drink.

Shinki lowered her arm and smiled, her eyes returning to a pale blue. “I’ll tell the travel agency to knock it off. Is there anything else you’d like, little one?”

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Unfortunately, any questions Reimu asked about the time reset led nowhere. Shinki didn’t have any more info on the topic than Reimu did, despite being able to tell that it happened.

Maybe it wasn’t such a bad thing after all, though. With Reimu knowing what the incidents were before they even started, she’d be able to relax more often.

Reimu poured herself another cup of tea, waiting warmly under her Kotatsu.

1.3: Hopeless Masquerade *by Mercurial Wilting*

[Touhou]

Reimu bitterly nursed another bottle of sake. How many resets has she been through? 10? 20? 100? She wasn't really keeping track, though it might actually give her something to do.

It was always after she defeated Okina. Reimu would have one more day with everyone, before… poof. She’d wake up 20 years earlier about 30 seconds before her shrine gets destroyed. Again. With her purple hair.

No one was able to explain what was going on. Shinki, despite being the first able to tell what was happening, was powerless here. The immortals gave her confused looks, and even Eirin had turned her away with a shrug.

At first, Reimu had thought it to be fine. She'd go solve the incidents, or stop them before they even began, then try and find ways to kill time until the next time she had to get out of her shrine.

A few decades later, and she had run out of ideas. Granted, the only idea she had was making her Shrine successful. Not an easy task, considering how she didn't even know her god, but one that she succeeded at nonetheless. She had nearly beat out the Morya's in donations and faith generation by the end of it, while also forcing the Buddhists and Taoists to keep their heads down.

And then she went back again, right after dealing with Okina literally showing up at her front door.

For Reimu, the hardest part was how only the people seemed to stay the same. Information about her god was nearly nonexistent, and whatever information she did find was inconsistent.

Take her god. Supposedly one of the most important beings of Gensokyo, being the main source of power for the Hakurei Shrine Maiden. There wasn't a single text on their name that Reimu could find. Even disregarding their name, their identity was still variable. The one that she remembered was another woman that looked strangely like her mother. The next reset, it was a dragon with iridescent scales. Once it turned out to be Yukari and - urgh.

Reimu pulled out another bottle and started drinking at a furious pace.

It was just… absolutely impossible to tie down any real information. The constants were boring, while the variables were infuriating. It didn't help that nearly everyone she turned to thought she was crazy. Or, crazier than normal, at least, considering Gensokyo. Even Marisa and Sanae were weirded out when Reimu had brought it up some 30 years ago.

“You? Repeating time? I don’t think so, ze!”

“You have to admit, it sounds a little strange.”

They… they weren’t wrong. But for some reason, their words cut straight to Reimu’s heart.

No one believes her. No one can help her. There’s no one for her. She’s practically hundreds of years old and she’s all alone. And she can’t… she can’t…

She can’t…

…

She can’t.

>{_}<

Marisa touched down with a crash, blowing away all the leaves in the courtyard. Again.

Oh well, she could just fix it with a spell later. Assuming Reimu doesn't throw her out, first.

In her arms was a package from Yukari. “Gifts for Reimu,” Yukari said. Marisa wasn’t usually the type to do deliveries, but she also wasn’t the type to anger reality warpers for no good reason. She could drop off a package, no sweat.

“Yooo, Reimuu! Anyone home?”

Odd. Usually, Reimu was at least drinking at this time. The sun hasn't even set yet, and there hasn't been a major incident for almost a year now. Usually that just meant that there was one right around the corner, but there wasn't much that you could do about that.

"Reiiiimuuu!"

Still no response. Maybe she was just busy inside?

Marisa slammed open the doors, dropping off the package near the donation box. Any of the local Youkai knew better than to touch anything near the donation box - the Shrine Maiden's wrath was *legendary* .

Well, maybe not the fairies, but Marisa could scare them off easy enough.

"Yo, Reimu, I got this package for you, ze. Special from Yukari. I think it's some drink, but I haven't checked.

Still nothing. Was she sleeping?

"Reimu?"

Marisa slowly tip-toed towards Reimu's room, taking care to avoid the squeaky planks. If there's anything she's learned about Reimu over the years, it's that she *hates* being woken up.

She slides open the door again, sticking her head inside. "Reimu, you awake or - eh?"

Inside, Reimu was curled up on her futon, shaking. Surrounding her were a worrying amount of empty sake bottles - at *least* a dozen.

Any humor in Marisa's mind was immediately wiped away, replaced with concern for her best friend, "Oi, oi, oi, Reimu, what's wrong, ze? Bad day for ya? Sanae dropped by again?"

Marisa gently shook Reimu's shoulders. Reimu didn't respond at first, only continuing to sob.

Not knowing what else to do, Marisa just took off her hat. Taking care not to bump into any bottles, she slowly laid down behind the crying Shrine Maiden and wrapped her in a hug from behind.

"There there," she murmured. "The world will still be here for you when you're ready for it. Just take your time."

The sobbing didn't stop for a long while.

1.4: Thank You For Being a Friend, Ze *by Wookywok*

[Touhou]

Marisa very nearly fell off her broom in surprise. Which was weird, because she was fairly certain that not three seconds ago she was in her house boiling mushrooms and *not* on said broom, soaring over Misty Lake under a foggy blood-red sky.

The magician quickly gathered her bearings and began observing her surroundings. "Let's see, red mist... I'm headin' in the general direction of the Mansion..." She swooped down to the water, taking a look at her reflection. "...aaaaand I'm younger." She quirked an eyebrow. "And questionin' younger me's fashion choices, ze."

The blond sighed, still gazing into the water. "Well, there are two explanations for this, ze. Either my brain really did get shunted back to the day of the scarlet mist incident... or I just

had a really advanced daydream."

She took a moment to contemplate. "Knowin' Gensokyo, it's probably the former."

She sighed. "Whatever. Sakuya knows a thing or three about time. I'll ask her before I beat her up this time, ze."

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Long story short, Sakuya knew nothing about the time travel.

Marisa sat sideways on her broom, dangling her feet an inch above the waters of the lake.

"Welp." The magician looked down at her reflection on the still waters. "Looks like it's just you and me, ze." She suddenly grew a thoughtful look. "Actually..."

She dipped her hand down and touched the water's surface, distorting the image. "Am I alone?"

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Of all the things Reimu knew were going to happen today, Marisa stepping up to the Hakurei Shrine like she had an entire skeleton's worth of bones to pick with her and challenging her to a duel in order to "test out a new spellcard"... was *not* one of them.

And even if she had been expecting it, she was expecting said spell to be "Non-Directional Laser"... not "Wide Master." The shrine maiden was pretty sure that the magician wouldn't invent that spell until... the fugitive incident...

"WHOA! Ceasefire! Ceasefire!"

Marisa stopped shooting giant lasers, although her mini-hakkero was still pointed at her opponent. "Yeah?" she asked, hesitantly but curiously.

"Marisa. It's not a trick. I'm being serious here." She sighed. "I need to ask you a strange question, and I want you to answer truthfully."

"Shoot, ze." The magician rethought her statement for a moment and glowered. "Proverbially."

Reimu sighed. "I'm gonna sound crazy, but... have you found yourself in the past recently?"

The blond's eyes widened. "Actually... yeah. I kicked Okina's butt, I took some time off to relax, and then suddenly I was headin' to the mansion to steal books. Have you... have you been WHOAWHOAWHOA--"

Marisa was cut off by her friend flying toward her at top speed and wrapping her into an enormous hug, nearly knocking the magician off her broom. Reimu began practically blubbering, talking faster than Marisa had ever remembered her ever talking before. "Oh thank the gods you're really here you actually remember it's a miracle I thought I was gonna be alone forever--"

"Geez, Reimu. When'd you get so huggy, ze?" The magician awkwardly pried the shrine maiden off her.

"Sorry, I kind of lost control of myself there." Reimu took a deep breath, tears still forming in her eyes. "Just... let's call off the duel for now. There's something I need to talk to you about."

1.5: Conspiracy Theories *by Wookywok*

[Touhou]

Reimu sat at her kotatsu, nursing a cup of sake. Normal winter was ending, and the endless winter was soon to start, if her timing was correct. Pretty soon, she would be heading to the Netherworld, beating up the Prismrivers, beating up Youmu, beating up Yuyuko blah blah blah restoring spring blah blah...

Urgh.

Ennui was a powerful force.

The shrine maiden's thoughts were disrupted by a distinctive clanking noise from outside -- not a sound she heard often, but one she knew instantly. Someone, for some reason, had donated to the shrine.

She looked out the window, considering trying to catch a glimpse of the generous person. To her surprise, there was a famiiar black hat. "Marisa? You actually donated?"

"Knew that'd get your attention, ze! Mind if I come in?"

Reimu sighed. "Might as well. I've got nothing better to do."

"Great! It's freezing out here, ze." The magician slid open the door and entered, taking a seat at the kotatsu. "Ooh, warm."

"So, what brings you here?"

"Same thing that's been makin' me do a lot of stuff recently, ze. Tryin' to keep myself sane, mostly." Marisa gestured toward the sake gourd on the table. "Mind if I help myself?"

"Sure, you know where the cupboard is." The shrine maiden gave a noncommital *huff* . "You know, I wouldn't have pegged you as sane to begin with."

The blonde rolled her eyes as she got up to grab a cup. "You know what I mean, ze. I've seen you in a bad place. I don't wanna do that myself -- unless the 'existence is pain' sake is just that good."

Reimu gave a dry chuckle. "Only in the moment, and the hangover isn't worth it." She stared into her cup. "Whatever's causing these time repeats, it sure doesn't seem to care much about my well being."

Marisa returned to the kotatsu with a glass in her hand and a pensive look on her face. "Y'know, that does beg the question, ze. What *is* causin' these time loops, anyway?"

Reimu poured some sake into her friend's cup. "Some pretty powerful magic, probably."

"Well yeah, it's obviously magic, ze. But that's like sayin' that this shrine is made outta 'stuff'. It's technically true, but it says absolutely nothing."

Reimu took a sip of her drink. "I know, I know. I just have no idea where to start."

"Well, the best place to start is with who *could* do this! Quick, ze -- who do we know who's powerful enough to change time?"

"Umm... I dunno, Shinki? I've asked everyone I know who could do it, they've all said no."

Marisa took a swig of sake. "Reimu, you've known me for longer than the average human lifespan and you don't believe people can *lie* ? There's a ton of youkai and gods and whatnot who could do this and claim responsibility, ze. Maybe this is some weird experiment by Yukari or somethin'."

"It wouldn't be Yukari. Yukari cares too much about Gensokyo to put me in the mental state that the repeats did."

"Hmm. True, ze." The magician put a hand to her chin, *hmm* ing contemplatively for a moment. "Wait a sec. Crazy theory, ze. You and I both took that weird drug that Reisen brought us during the Lunarian invasion, right? The 'see the future' stuff?"

"I already asked Eirin. It's not a side effect, and the Lunarians haven't tried anything with time travel."

"Well damn. I got nothin' then, ze. Unless this is... I dunno, the Moriyas? They caused... will cause a lotta incidents, I guess."

The shrine maiden snorted. "If this somehow gets them faith, I'll eat my gohei."

"Yeah, I'm just throwin' words at this point. I'm stumped, ze."

The two humans sat in silence for a solid minute.

"What if," said Reimu, "What if it's someone we don't know who's got something out for us?"

"Whaddya figure?"

"I mean, look at us. The two most powerful humans in Gensokyo. The prime incident resolvers. If someone wanted to mess with Gensokyo, wouldn't they want to target us first?"

"So you're sayin' someone's tryin' to mess with our heads, ze?"

"And doing a fine job of it." The shrine maiden was staring into her sake again. "I don't know, it's just a theory. I hope."

She gulped.

"I hope."

1.6: Hell's Own Furnace *by Mercurial Wilting*

"Yo Reimu, I found something for you, ze!" Marisa slammed the door open, as she usually did, greeting Reimu with a maniacal grin on her face and something on her back.

In other words, business as usual for Reimu. "Morning, Marisa. Close the door behind you, will you? It's cold."

"No worries, I got just the thing for you, ze. Here, catch!" Marisa slung something off her shoulders, half-tossing it into Reimu's lap.

Reimu looked down to see Utsuho staring her in the face. "Big sister!" She squealed, glomping Reimu in a crushing hug.

"Utsuho? What are you doing here?" Reimu shot a glare at Marisa. "Marisa didn't kidnap you, right?"

"No? Lady Satori said I could go, so..." Utsuho's eyebrows furrowed in thought. "I'm not breaking any rules, right?"

'She's warm,' Reimu thought. "Mmmm... No, not really."

"So, how is it, ze?" Marisa's grin went from maniacal to shit-eating after watching Reimu. "Okuu's pretty hot, right? Makes a good heater?"

Reimu grumbled, but didn't push Okuu away either.

1.7: Through the Rabbit Hole *by Mercurial Wilting*

[Touhou]

Alice was, by her own admission, a bit scatterbrained at times. It came with the territory of being a magician. And, by extension, someone who ran experiments all the time. Days would pass without alice taking notice, whereupon Marisa would barge in and either drag her outside or force her to get some rest.

This was especially true if she was working on Goliath Doll in her... Storage silo.

Despite this, Alice didn't think that she was so ignorant as to miss the *entirety of Autumn* . But, judging by the snow falling outside her window, that's exactly what happened. She stayed up too late partying after the latest incident with one of Gensokyo's Sages, and somehow slept all the way to Winter.

Nope, that still can't be right. Alice has been here before, she knew. An odd sense of Deja Vu, along with two sets of memories that didn't quite mesh with each other. She remembered Marisa going down to Makai to knock some sense into her, with the help of her teacher. But now, she also remembered Reimu doing it, except by herself.

Something wasn't right.

Alice might have been better classed in Enchantments rather than Divination, but she wouldn't let that stop her. It wasn't long before she had multiple divination spells in front of

her, along with a handful of grimoires Patchouli had let her copy that contained instructions for even more divination spells.

The only problem was that all of them told her conflicting information. None of them could agree on if she went back in time, or if she was cursed, or if it was all a dream.

For a brief moment, the thought this being Eirin's new shady drug floated through Alice's mind. She did, after all, become incomprehensibly drunk at the last party with the Sage (In no small part due to Marisa, who kept insisting that she drink more).

That's not right either. Even Eirin's ultramarine Orb Elixir only lasted a few minutes at most. Not to mention that it was an entirely different effect.

20 years was a little bit longer than a few minutes, to say the least.

Out of options, and slowly getting ever more frustrated, Alice decided that she'll simply brute force the answer. She didn't like doing so often, but it was easy enough to contact Shinki in Makai. It was just a matter of opening her personal grimoire, and...

Having nothing happen at all. Alright, that's certainly vexing.

"Yo, Alice! I got a neat trick to show you, yo!"

Well, there's Marisa, slamming open Alice's door. Instantly, dolls formed up around Alice - partly an automatic defense mechanism, partly a show of strength. It all depended on who was coming through her door.

Of course, since it was just Marisa, Alice simply waved a hand. The dolls fell out of formation, floating back to their hiding spots around the house. "What do you need, Marisa? Is it about the latest incident again?"

Marisa waved off Alice's offer without hesitation. "Nah, Reimu's got that, yo. 'Sides, I got something to show ya!"

"Marisa if you set off another explosion in my house I swear I'm going to-" Alice paused as she took in Marisa's new outfit. "Why are you green?

Marisa actually paused at this comment, looking down at herself. "New outfit, ze!" she exclaimed in the same tone of voice she uses when Patchouli asks when her books are going to be returned.

"Marisa, I've known you for the better part of a decade." That wasn't technically true, it was closer to two or three decades, now. "You've worn nothing but black. *Occasionally* blue," Alice added, knowing that Marisa was ready with her usual retort.

"Oi! I've worn other colors before! Didn't we meet while I was still wearing purple?" Marisa, for her part, still had one ready. Of course she did.

"Maybe so, but you were also a redhead back then. Did you get caught in another potions accident?" It wouldn't have been the first time this happened. Or the second. Or the third, the fourth, the fifth...

Quite frankly it was a miracle Marisa was still alive, but that's neither here nor there.

"Nah! Just felt like throwing some other colors on, ze!" Marisa slung her broom over her shoulder. "Hey, want to go visit Reimu?"

"Not particularly." The reply was instant; Reimu in the face of a new incident was not a pleasant thing to be close to. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, I was just thinking that she'd be ecstatic to see someone else like her. I mean, you're going back in time too, right?"

Oh. That changed... everything, really.

"Heh! Just as I thought, ze!" A familiar chaotic grin affixed itself on Marisa's face, if a few shades more serious than usual. "Seriously, you've gotta come with me to see Reimu. She'll practically be glowing when she hears about someone else like her, ze!"

"Someone else..." Marisa and Reimu were also going back in time... For a while now, judging by what Marisa said about Reimu. "Are you sure?"

"Yeah, of course, ze! She's been looking for someone like you for a long time now, you know?"

"For how long?" Alice had to know. Maybe Reimu would know what's going on.

"Hmm..." Marisa started tapping her foot in thought. "Well, I've been with Reimu some... 13 resets maybe? So... 20 years to a reset, 13 resets..."

"260 years, ze. More than that, actually, since she's been searching since before I joined her. Hey, that means I'm older than you now, ze!"

260 years... Alice was immortal, or at least unaging, but she was a *young* immortal. Her own age was 40 - no, 60 years old now.

That's going to be confusing...

"How long has Reimu been looping before you?"

"Looping? Is that what you're going to call it?" Marisa paused for a moment, nodding to her own thoughts. "Yeah, I guess looping would fit well. It feels like a time loop, anyways.

"As for how long Reimu's been looping... uh..." Marisa scratched the back of her head. "Well, she never actually told me, but... She burst into tears when she found out about me."

"This is the same Reimu that's beaten down gods, right?" Alice wasn't as close to Reimu as Marisa was, but this went against almost everything Alice knew about Reimu. She was stoic, grumpy, and ruthless, but never one to cry. Not even back then, all those years back in Makai.

"Yeah, same Reimu, ze. She didn't... Hm..." Marisa's face shifted to a more serious expression. An odd expression to see on the Magician, but not entirely out of character either. "Let me describe a scenario for you.

"Imagine going back in time. Right now, ze. You're the only one who knows what happens in the future.

"Now, when you get back up to this point, right here, you go back again. Same people, same series of events, ze. You're still the only one that knows what happens in the future. You still with me, Alice?"

Alice nodded assent, despite the explanation sounding like something out of a fictional novel. After all, this *was* Gensokyo, which was famously screwy with magic.

"Great, I haven't lost you. Now, the last time I asked, Reimu said that she counted about 100 loops before giving up. That's about 2,000 years, ze. I dunno about you, Alice, but I'm not sure if I can handle two thousand years of being surrounded by the same, unchanging faces, with nobody believing a word I'd say.

"Feh, look at me being all serious. I should just take you to Reimu." Marisa shook her head, then looked back up at Alice with a smile. "So, how 'bout it, ze? Want to see Reimu cry?"

Alice only had more questions to ask, but it looked like Marisa didn't know anything. Then again, neither did Reimu, or she would have told Marisa. 2000 years is... a long time. "Is she really going to cry when she sees me?"

"Heh! Probably! Reimu's a real softie at heart past her grumpiness." Marisa stuck out a hand, gesturing for Alice to follow. "C'mon, what're you waiting for?"

"Almost four times my age, yet nothing's changed about you." Alice shook her head, already setting up a squad of dolls to take care of the house in her absence. "I know how to get to the Shrine myself, thank you very much."

Marisa swung her broom off her shoulders, ready to take off as soon as she was clear of the roof. "Suit yourself, ze! No turning back now!"

Marisa *almost* made it past the door before Alice could shoot back with a snarky comment.

Almost. "I distinctly remember you running away from me the first time we met."

"You were threatening to turn me into a doll, ze! I think that gives me an excuse!"

1.8: Goliath Doll Project: Development Log. *by Mercurial Wilting*

[Touhou]

Alice Margatroid, Loop 17

Entry 1.

In an attempt to keep my thoughts in line I've requisitioned a spare notebook from Patchouli. I could have obtained one myself but I wanted to see her response to such a request. Results are

In response, she has given me a high-quality notebook, I suspect one that she planned to use herself. It's hard to gauge her relationship with me between loops; sometimes she thinks that I'm wasting my talents on dolls of all things, while other times she sees me as no more than a source of information for enchantments, and still other times where she wants me to do things to her that I shouldn't be writing down.

I believe that in this loop she sees me as a cordial business partner - A fellow magician with their own goals to occasionally collaborate with when their expertise is required and left alone otherwise.

This is in contrast with Marisa, who hardly ever collaborates with me in a professional manner. She seems to view these time loops as a chance to re-explore and re-investigate anything and everything. Luckily, she's been dissuaded from stealing anything as things she steals from this loop won't carry over to the next loop, but I imagine it's only a matter of time before she figures out a method of storage that carries over between loops. She always was infuriatingly talented at figuring out impossible methods and uses of magic, such as her cold inferno spell.

This, however, did not stop her from witnessing me accidentally transferring my consciousness into a group of Shanghai dolls. Dolls modeled after Shanghai, that is. It was a strange experience that followed after another strange loop where this body in Gensokyo was a doll that I controlled from Makai.

Marisa, after confirming that my body was fine and I wasn't dead, found the situation hilarious.

Reimu disagreed, stating in no uncertain terms that if I were to ever do it again she would seal me into a jar next to Marisa's old master for the rest of the loop. I suspect that she's bluffing, or at least she's more concerned about not letting me die in an accident, as she was substantially more panicked than Marisa about my then mindless body suddenly pitching forward as if I died.

Regardless, I plan on dedicating this loop to further developing the Goliath Doll. I do not feel that it would be proper to give her a name until she is complete, and thus far I haven't yet completed her in a single loop.

My current theory as to why the Goliath Doll fails after roughly 2 minutes of use is the enchantment for fine motor control overloading the joints. My reasoning is as follows.

The Goliath doll is constructed with primarily wood and fabric from the human village. Secondary materials revolve around enchantments, such as gold and gemstones that I either procure myself or requisition from Patchouli.

None of these materials would cause any sort of explosion or even fire when damaged or otherwise stressed. Thus, the fault must be in the enchantments themselves failing.

This is to be expected, as my experience with enchantments is limited solely to dolls roughly a foot in height or the previously mentioned human-sized doll I controlled from Makai. Neither of those equates to a 20 to 30-foot-tall ‘doll.’

Curiously, Reimu looks to be a viable source of assistance, as she’s mentioned previously that she’s reinforced her shrine against things such as Tenshi’s earthquake. Her shrine is actually quite big, so I’m curious how she has succeeded in making wood and rope so resistant to earthquakes as to simply shrug them off as if they were a stiff breeze.

In the meantime, I will be practicing enchanting large objects with increasing complexity of enchantments. Then I will enchant large objects with increasing complexity of objects. Then, a combination of the two, though I am currently unsure of what those combinations would be.

Results will be recorded separately in a more disposable form of record-keeping in case the enchantments fail spectacularly. I would like to keep this notebook for as long as I can. Which seems ridiculous, considering that I will be guaranteed to lose this by the end of the loop, but I would like to at least make an attempt.

Alice.

1.9: Marisa Gets High on Shrooms *by Wookywok*

[Touhou]

Marisa studied the mushroom she was holding. Even though the specifics of the local mushroom species were different each go-around, the magician was pretty sure they had never been this different.

It appeared to be a beautiful specimen of its species (whatever said species was.) It was big, plump, squishy but firm, and its cap was a vibrant red with white spots.

It also had *eyes* .

Marisa shrugged and placed it (and a few more like it) into her basket. She could work with it.

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"Why am I here again?"

The magician didn't even look at the shrine maiden as she cleared off a small bit of table. "Cause at this point, possibly bein' in life-threatenin' danger with someone who remembers somethin' is preferable to the existential ennui of doin' the same thing over and over again with people who *don't* until ya go mad, ze. Hold this." She handed Reimu a beaker. The miko blinked in surprise.

"Besides, you're probably as curious as I am, ze. Ya just don't show it." Marisa grabbed a mushroom out of her basket. "Anyhoo, TEST ONE! Direct ingestion!"

Reimu sighed. "You're really doing this."
~~~~~~~~~~

"Yes I am, ze!" The blond-haired girl took a massive bite out of the fungus's cap. She chewed for a bit and swallowed. "Hmm. Not b--"

Marisa was interrrupted when she suddenly grew by about two-thirds of a meter.

"Whoa." The magician looked down at the floor. "I'm tall. I'm... *tall* . *I'm* tall."

"...Marisa?"

" *I'm tall* . I'm TALL, ZE! BOW DOWN TO MY SUPREME TALLNESS! GYAHAHAHAHA!"

Reimu reflexively backed away and threw the beaker at her currently tall and maniacally laughing friend. It struck the blond square in the face, knocing her to the ground as well as shrinking her back to her normal size.

"Uuuughhh..." Marisa shook her head a bit, seemingly back to normal. "ya didn't have to go that far, ze. Thanks, though, I guess." She got up and looked down at her body. "And I'm short again. Damn."

Reimu sighed. "That's probably for the best."

1.10: Goliath Doll Project: Development Log. (Part 2) *by Mercurial Wilting*

[Touhou]

Alice Margatroid, Loop 17

Entry 2.

Originally, I had planned to update this log daily. Clearly, I should have known that I would be far too busy for a detailed daily report.

It has been 13 days since the last update. Many things have happened since then, most of those things having little to do with the Goliath Doll Project. This is due to the fact that working with large objects attracts attention, usually unwanted attention with youkai challenging me to a fight for being suspicious, or because I looked strong, or whatever reason they decided to come up with.

Consequently, a great deal of my time is being spent in combat, which then requires an equally great deal of time repairing and replenishing my combat dolls, which then requires time to gather the materials required for upkeep, and so on and so forth.

It may be better for me to put this project on hold in favor of improving my combat doll force.

Regarding the enchantment of large objects.

Preliminary results have been good, allowing me to extend the average runtime of the goliath doll from a paltry 60 seconds to a more reasonable 150 seconds. An unexpected benefit of this extended run time is that Cirno no longer has the patience to fight the Goliath Doll, though that will likely change in the future.

I wonder what Cirno would be like if she were to be a part of these time loops? Something to think of in the future.

Returning to the main topic, I've come across another unexpected result by sheer chance. The result is that, while the enchantment failing does indeed cause spectacular failure through rapid and explosive disassembly, the material failing first can also cause the enchantment to fail in such a way. I did not notice this at first, as the original Goliath Doll seemed to be able

to weather attacks from Cirno well enough, however a chance encounter has proven otherwise.

The background.

I had felled a tree near my house, as that is the largest singular object I see myself enchanting in the future. I then enchanted it with a simple rotary motion spell, as a cylinder without some form of thrust or joint can only move in so many ways. This is when I was pulled away from enchantments due to someone firing danmaku at me, and in the ensuing match a stray bullet impacted the log. A slight indentation formed in the log, which was followed by the enchantment sparking and releasing an unhealthy amount of smoke. This was then followed by rapid and unplanned disassembly, resulting in the loss of two lancer dolls, a shielder doll, and a pair of stockings ruined by debris.

My current theory is that this catastrophic failure simply does not happen when the enchanted material is damaged at the scale I usually enchant things. Perhaps the fact that more magic is being thrown around is inducing volatility, or perhaps the fact that more material means more reagents for explosive reactions, which chains together in such a way that the enchantment explodes like out of fantasy.

Whatever the case may be, the results are clear, and I will have to do further testing on the effects of damaging enchanted materials.

With this in mind, my next course of action is to procure materials from throughout Gensokyo for further testing. After some deliberation, I've come up with three options for materials that I would like to do further testing on.

The first is wood. Wood is plentiful and can easily be obtained from the human village, however in this loop the wood from the human village is treated in some way that is interfering with my more powerful enchantments. I will need to source alternative options, likely harvesting and processing it myself.

I suppose that I may as well learn now, given the endless expanse of time ahead of me.

The next is metal, which I can obtain in bulk from either the Kappa or the underground. If they were here, the Moriya would be a good source of iron. However, seeing as I have not yet seen a soot-covered Sanae flying back to Youkai Mountain, I assume that they had not yet arrived. I also am not allowed in the underground, still, and sending Marisa to do my shopping would be idiotic stupid a recipe for disaster unwise. Thus, I will be visiting the kappa.

The last option is more of a curiosity that I have heard stories of - Bamboo. I am unsure how I would obtain bamboo in the bamboo forest of the lost without directly harvesting it, and I would much rather trade for it than potentially anger the residents for the loop. Perhaps I will need to find that Fujiwara girl first.

I will also be needing materials for enchantment. I want to test inlays and alloys, and I may as well ask Patchouli now rather than later. Marisa might also be willing to assist, as this contains more excitement than shopping, as well as the fact that after the fact she can simply take whatever excess there is for herself.

Lastly, I've spoken to Reimu. She was less than enlightening on the topic, saying that "the stick that bends beats the tree that breaks." I'm not sure what that means in relation to my original question of her reinforcing her shrine against vibrations, but there must be some form of logic to it for it to make sense to her. I'll need to think further on the topic.

Alice.

1.11: Yin and Yang (And Marisa) *by Wookywok*

[Touhou]

Marisa skidded to a halt a few inches above the ground as she arrived in front of the Hakurei Shrine. She hopped off her broom and immediately began running for the building's entrance. "Yo! Reimu! I just had the greatest idea, ze! You gotta... hear..."

The magician stopped abruptly in front of the doorway, eyes wide in shock.

"...this."

Reimu lowered her teacup from her lips. "Hello, Marisa."

"Uhhh... hey, Reimu. And, uh, hey... Other Reimu."

Sure enough, there were two Reimus settled around the tea table -- one dressed in her normal red outfit, the other in a dark blue version of the same. "Come, have some tea with us," the blue one offered.

"Uhh... sure, Other Reimu. Blue Reimu. Bleimu. Reimblue. I have no idea what to call ya, ze." Marisa entered the shrine and sat down at the table. "So, uh... which one of ya's the real one, ze?"

The red Reimu took a sip of her tea and chuckled. "Well, we argued about that for a bit--"

"And beat each other up," her duplicate interjected.

"--and beat each other up, yes. But ultimately we decided that we're both the real Reimu."

"We have the same powers, appearances, personalities, and --most importantly-- memories. As far as we can tell, we're both Reimu, trapped in a seemingly-endless cycle of repeating time." The blue Reimu sighed. "It's somewhat terrifying, actually. For as variable as Gensokyo is from repeat to repeat, at least some things never changed. Now we can't even be sure that the constants stay constant!"

"Yikes." Marisa scratched the back of her head. "Sorry... this is just so weird. Uh... wanna hear my plans for this go-around? I was gonna mess with Tenshi, and I think I can accomodate a third person in my plans, ze."

The two shrine maidens nodded. "Sure," they said simultaneously.

The magician shuddered. "Please don't do that, ze. Anyway, we're gonna need a missile from the kappa, a seed of non-identification, and an army of willing Suikas..."

1.12: Goliath Doll Project: Development Log. (Part 3) *by Mercurial Wilting*

[Touhou]

Alice Margatroid, Loop 17

Entry 3.

I did not think Marisa would be so bold as to steal a notebook I'm writing in but these have been strange times. Not only did she steal it, but she added her own notes to it while running at top speed, even though flying would have been both faster and more stable.

I would have been impressed, were it not for the holes in my clothing.

Regardless, her notes are useful, and I will be appending a copy of them to the end of this log once I am finished. It seems that these time loops have been good for experimentation, especially for someone as insane chaotic as Marisa.

For the log, I had thought to write down my current findings on the requisition of building materials.

Wood is plentiful in Gensokyo, and harvesting wood was a deceptively simple process. Processing it, however, is a different matter, and many days were lost in the learning process.

Two months have passed since the last entry, and a majority of that time was spent learning the basics of woodworking and metalworking.

Additionally, as before, a great amount of time was spent repairing and replenishing both my combat force and worker dolls, which required that I gathered more materials, which cost more of my worker and soldier dolls, ad nauseum, ad infinitum.

Fortunately, that is behind me, as is obtaining all of the other materials. Buying metal from the Kappa was a simple process, though leaving with my entire workforce and no random gadgets or upgrades was much harder. Learning to shape the metal to what I needed was much harder, but as I said in the previous entry I would likely have had to learn it eventually.

I did succeed in finding that Fujiwara girl. She did not guide me to Tewi, or to Eintei, but she assured me that I was free to harvest the forest as I pleased so long as it was "within reason."

Experimentation required that I tested the limits of that reason. Needless to say, I also had a difficult time leaving with my entire workforce.

Finally, the inlay and alloy materials. Patchouli balked when I handed her the full list, but as I explained things to her she eventually gave in and said that she would check her sources. So far she's given me a small amount for the enchantments I only plan on trying once or twice and promised that she will deliver more once she obtains it.

With the collection of materials finished, I started testing. Results are… mixed, and will be appended at the back of this journal as to keep all my data in one place. Marisa's notes will be right next to them.

Notes that I would like to take now

First, Bamboo.

Bamboo is light and has strong structural integrity, however it is also so flexible as to be unable to support weight without bending. While this disqualifies it for being a primary material, it would have been a prime material for a framework or skeleton of sorts if it weren't for the magical aspect of this project.

Enchanting Bamboo is a nuisance. A common result is for the bamboo or bamboo constructed mechanism to sit there and stare at me. The mechanisms that work properly also do not have a pattern, as neither overwhelming power or delicate suggestions or even a middle ground give consistent results. It seemed to be entirely random which mechanism would work, at least based on the data that I had already recorded.

However, there must be a pattern somewhere. I suspect that the seemingly random results are due to the harvest bamboo's close proximity to that Fujiwara girl and the moonborn residents. Marisa confirmed this, which is why I will be appending her own observations to this notebook rather than taking a torch to her and her observations.

I attempted to harvest bamboo farthest from both of their people to mitigate this conflicting attunement. However, I then discovered that Tewi has an impressively far reach when she wants to, where I then decided that my time and effort were better placed elsewhere.

I will need to run further experiments some other time, either when all parties forget or the next loop after this. Given their immortality, I suspect the second is more likely.

Next, Metal.

Metal is heavy and difficult to work with. Part of this is inexperience, I'm sure, however I am unaware of any blacksmith in Gensokyo that would be willing to work the quantity of metal that I require. The choices I'm aware of are a few in the Tengu village, the entirety of the Kappa, and likely multiple someones in the underground.

However, the Tengu do not take kindly to outsiders, I am not allowed in the underground yet, and the Kappa are the Kappa. Perhaps I'll collaborate with the Kappa some other time, but for now I would like my project to remain as my project.

At the very least, enchanting metal has a pattern. Metal is heavy, and thus requires more power than wood does to perform the same tasks. Conversely, metal is strong, requiring less structural enchantments than wood would. In the event that this path leads to a dead-end, the skills I learn here will still be useful later.

Of course, given the supposedly infinite expanse of time ahead of me, I'm certain that all learned skills will come into use eventually.

Finally, wood.

Wood is wood. Plentiful, reliable, easy to work with, and relatively light compared to my other options. Harvesting and processing the wood myself is the difficult part of the process, however, I believe that's an acceptable sacrifice for the Goliath Doll project. Of course, I will still need more practice with the harvesting and processing of wood for better results, but as I said with metal, I have time to spare for it.

For enchantments, wood performed almost exactly as expected. There were a few hiccups with wood I harvested near my house and Marisa's house due to the experiments we run indoors that stop being indoors for one reason or another. Magic gets along well with magic, except when it doesn't.

Either way, the material can only handle so much before, at best, the enchantment fizzles out and does nothing. At worst, I receive another case for why I shouldn't be using the wood near my house for enchantments.

Inlays and alloys will be tested at another time. I would prefer to proceed to bulk production for large scale tests. I would prefer, but then I would need to dedicate more time to collecting materials, which comes at the cost of my regular doll force. I would rather not lose another two weeks to the repair and replacement of my combat and harvest dolls, so I will instead return to focusing on improving my combat force. Likely I should also practice the production side of things, as well, but with the exception of the exploders I'm loath to treat my dolls as mere mass produced fodder.

I will see what I can do. Luckily, my results here should also apply to the small scale, so it should only be a week or two of work for even more time saved.

Alice.

1.13: True Administrator *by Mercurial Wilting*

[Touhou] [Admin Shenanigans]

This loop, Reimu woke up to a large, black shape on her window. A shadow, she thought. Then she rubbed the sleep out of her eyes and realized that it was a bird. Which is a strange thing, considering that there shouldn't have been any black bird that cared about her existence enough to visit her bedroom through the window, or smart enough to know how to open the thing.

Aya knew of her, sure, but Aya didn't usually care about Reimu's existence until after the spell card rules were instated. Even then, Aya wasn't literally a black bird. Utsuho had a bird form, but Utsuho wouldn't even know that Reimu existed until that geyser went up and made Reimu go down to the Underground.

Reimu shook her head. First, deal with the bird. "Do you… need something?"

It looked at her for a long moment… then cawed. "Yes, actually. I've been meaning to meet with you for some time now, but outside circumstances prevented it.

The bird spoke perfect Japanese. And it sounded like if Rinnosuke spoke like Kaguya.

…

Sure, why not.

“So, what do you need?” Reimu asked. Then, she looked down, remembering her state of dress. “Actually, could you - give me a moment?”

“Of course,” it – he? The voice sounded male, but with animals and spirits… better to be safe – he cawed again. Then he took off, going to who knows where. Well, Reimu could guess; he was probably headed to her front porch. Everyone went there when they needed her, and some of them actually stayed there.

Reimu sat still for another moment, wondering what she might be getting herself into. Then, after concluding that it really couldn’t hurt that much to hear out the bird’s request, she threw off her covers and started dressing herself.

[]

The bird was, indeed, perched on Reimu’s front porch, in direct view of the front door. He had busied himself by preening his wings, though Reimu stepping through her front door had drawn his attention to her.

“Right,” Reimu started, absently brushing a stray hair out of her face. “So, what was it that you needed?”

The bird fixed Reimu with a strangely intense gaze, especially for a bird. “I wanted to meet with *you* , Hakurei. I believe you’ve been seeking out answers about your current situation since its beginning. I deeply apologize for having taken so long, but I believe I have the answers to a majority of your questions.”

“Answers,” Reimu said, her voice flat.

Answers, she silently repeated. Like why the time loops. Why the world kept changing around her. Why the people keep changing with the world. Why she was alone for so long without anyone to follow her.

“Who are you?” She asked instead.

The bird tilted his head, continuing to stare into what felt like Reimu’s soul. “Forgive me, but I’m curious. Before I answer you, who do you think I am, Hakurei?

Reimu matched his gaze. His eyes glowed with power, as if a fragment of the sun was speaking through his form. She looked past his gaze, and took note of his size; big, not only for a crow, but just in general. He looked big enough to kidnap one of the fairies on a whim. Reimu then looked down and saw the final clue; a third leg, almost tucked away underneath all the plumage.

What was the name of that god that Kanako had fed to Okuu again?

“Yatagarasu,” she answered. “The eight-span crow with three legs.”

“Well done!” he crowed. “You’ve done your research! I should have expected as much, given your proximity to the Shinto mythos.”

“It comes with the job.” Not really. It came from the many, many times Reimu had listened to Kosuzu ramble about youkai in one of her investigations. Somehow, despite her asking Kosuzu over multiple loops, now, the librarian always had new information about some Youkai or another.

Not that Reimu would have said any of that to him.

Yatagarasu made some sort of rumbling noise - was that a laugh? “Of course! Though, I should preface that while I might be Yatagarasu, I might not be the Yatagarasu you recognize. There have been many versions of myself, after all, and I am but one facet of humanity’s belief.”

“Same as any god,” Reimu dismissed. “I already know that you aren’t mine. Mine is more fire and headache than god.”

Yatagarasu seemed to agree. “So it seems; I would like to meet them, myself. However, I have to correct you on one thing; in a way, I am yours. I am… I am the Administrator in charge of your universe, and I come bearing a message from the heavens.”

He coughed, a loud and singular shriek that reminded Reimu of a stuck door suddenly getting unstuck. “Well, perhaps not Heaven, but the realm that’s above yours. Are you familiar with what Yggdrasil is?”

Reimu shook her head. The name itself was familiar, likely something that either Yukari or Marisa mentioned, but that was all.

“No? We’ll start there, then. Here, come down to the ground. I need something to draw on and the earth is as good a canvas as any.” Yatagarasu hopped down the steps - an amusing sight, considering his size compared to the steps itself - and strutted over to a bare patch of dirt.

He started scratching designs into the dirt with a single talon, which Reimu eventually recognized as a tree.

“This,” Yggdrasil started, still scratching in more detail to the tree, “is Yggdrasil. Also known as the world tree.”

He drew a circle inside of Yggdrasil, then a smaller circle inside of the first circle. “Just as Gensokyo is a world contained inside what you call the Outside World, so too are both your worlds contained inside of Yggdrasil. Not only your world, either, but every other world in existence. Every world, every dimension, every plane, every realm, everything. All of it, both real and what you might think fictional, contained inside of Yggdrasil.

“And about… well, a long time ago, in the realm of thousands of thousands of thousands of thousands of thousands of years ago, something broke it.” Yatagarasu dragged a talon down the center of his drawing, nearly splitting it in two.

Reimu blinked. “Broke… Yggdrasil. The thing that keeps existence intact.”

Yatagarasu nodded. “To this day we’re still not sure what originally broke Yggdrasil, but the fact remains that it was broken. Almost died, in fact, prompting the Administrators watching over Yggdrasil - my superiors - to put each and every universe into stasis to try and prevent further damage.”

“Sounds like what Kaguya does with Eintei,” Reimu muttered. Or maybe what Eirin does. Keeping their world in stasis to prevent aging, or the passage of time, or the impurities of the world from destroying their world.

“It is similar, yes.” Yatagarasu nodded again, approval clear in his voice. “However, this was only a temporary solution, as stagnation would also cause Yggdrasil to break down over time, only slower.”

“So, while going forward wasn’t an option, staying still was also no good, and going back is impossible. With all of this in mind, the Admins opted to take a different approach.”

Yatagarsu circled the seven largest branches of the Yggdrasil he drew. “They chose seven universes to experience an infinite loop of time. They would start at the most stable point in time and, when that stability started to deteriorate, reset the loop, starting everything from the beginning again. They called this - well, they didn’t call it anything, but the first people to experience the loops called it the infinite loops.”

He drew one more symbol underneath Yggdrasil, which Reimu recognized from Marisa’s notes as the symbol for infinity.

“While an imperfect solution, this approach succeeded in preventing Yggdrasil from both tearing itself apart from moving forward or slowly withering away from stagnation. Encouraged by this apparent success, the Admins decided to activate even more branches. This brings us to the now, with you and your branch being part of the latest wave of activated branches.” He finished off his explanation with another drawing beneath the infinity symbol. A table, something on the table - a tablet? - and a bird.

“There’s more to it, of course, such as Yggdrasil not literally being a tree, but it makes a good frame of reference.” He turned around, once again looking at Reimu. “Do you understand

everything I've said so far?

Reimu nodded. "I… do, yes. I have a question, though."

"What do you want to know?" Yatagarasu asked, his head tilted left now.

"You've spoken as if Yggdrasil can think for itself." Reimu frowned, thinking of the other maybe sentient tree that she has to deal with regularly. "Can it?"

Yatagarasu's answer was, at first, a dull rumble that shook itself from his beak, different from the other noise he made earlier. "Hard to say, though you and I both come from a culture where physical objects gaining sentience is not only common, but to be expected. Perhaps Yggdrasil is alive, and it chooses to cooperate with the guidance that we the Admins offer to it. Or perhaps it isn't alive, and Yggdrasil is simply a supremely complicated river of information, and we the Admins are simply stones that guide its path. Whatever the case may be, I cannot give you a concrete answer to your question."

So, just like the Ayakashi, Yggdrasil may or may not be alive and thinking. At least Reimu was used to this kind of thing. "It's alright. Thank you."

Yatagarasu… purred, for lack of a better word for it. "It was my pleasure, Hakurei. Now that you have the context, it's time for the details."

Yatagarasu took off, flying from the root of Yggdrasil all the way to the way top near the branches.

"Because Yggdrasil is broken, the time loops aren't perfect," Yatagarasu started, extending a straight line out of one of the undisturbed, not at all affected by his flying, branches. "If they were perfect, they would play back the branch's timeline without variations."

He labeled the first line with Reimu's name, then drew other lines that split off from the first line. "This first line is what we call the baseline loop. Occasionally, though, Yggdrasil will

occasionally get details wrong. These details can be almost anything. Things such as the spelling of a name, the circumstances of someone coming into existence, or even the existence of a world entirely."

One line he labeled with Reimu, but with the wrong character. Another line he labeled with… Reimu again, but in the English script that Marisa sometimes used for her experiments.

"These variants are ultimately good for Yggdrasil, as they keep it stimulated and thinking. However, left unchecked, these variants could cause Yggdrasil to incorrectly assume that these sometimes events are part of the Baseline."

"To prevent this, each activated branch has - usually - a single person, one that remembers the Baseline loop. They are the Anchor, keeping the branch in line and making sure that the branch grows properly with the correct timeline. Every branch requires an Anchor to begin looping, and if the Anchor dies, the loop crashes. Ends prematurely."

"I'm an Anchor," Reimu realized.

"Correct." Yatagarasu circled her name to punctuate his words. "Your first loop was the baseline, or as close to it as Yggdrasil could get. Your role as an Anchor means that you act as your branch's backup for Yggdrasil.

"The Anchor is a position that only requires a single entity. This is the bare minimum. However, having only one backup is foolish. As one of my superiors would say, one copy is none copy, and even two copies is one copy. Not to mention that consigning a single entity to potentially millions of years of isolation is unnecessarily cruel. To combat this, other entities can be activated."

He scratched in another name underneath Reimu's. Marisa's name. "They are not Anchors, in that the loop can run fine without them, however they will also remember what happens in every loop they take part in. This stabilizes the loop by keeping the Anchor stable, as well as being another backup in the event of an emergency. I do not believe we have run into any such emergencies that weren't already prepared for with a more pre-emptive solution, but we prefer being cautious."

“Some branches have no eligible candidates for loopers outside of the Anchor. Perhaps any candidates for looping would be better off not looping, or perhaps they simply don’t exist in the first place and the Anchor is the only sapient being in the branch. Whatever the case, this means that the Anchor is on their own.”

Yatagarasu dragged a line next to the original line labeled with Reimu and Marisa’s name. “To work around this, branches are sometimes allowed to cross over and run in parallel. This could mean a variety of things, but the core concept is at least one looper visiting a branch that isn’t their own. This could mean that your branch receives visitors, or you could be visiting other branches, or the branches even running in tandem and fusing the settings together. That last option was the first ever observed, and as such the blanket term for loops such as these are ‘fused’ loops.”

Yatagarasu looked up, all of a sudden, having paused in his scratching. “Visualizing this on a two dimensional plane is much harder than I thought it would be.”

Reimu stifled a giggle. She was more than familiar with Marisa physically grasping at empty air when she had trouble explaining something complicated.

He shook his head, going back to scratching things into the dirt. “Right, now where was I… Ah, right. Now, a consequence of loopers keeping their memories between loops is that you can obtain abilities or powers and so on in one loop and still be able to use them in another. Say that during one loop you gain the ability to breathe fire. So long as you don’t let the ability atrophy you will almost always be able to breathe fire, in the exact same way you did when you first gained the ability. If you were to gain another method of breathing fire, then you would simply have two different methods of breathing fire, with the same rules of atrophy applying to that second method.”

“The loopers of the first seven branches took notice of this transitive property, and after much time and experimentation they developed two techniques that take advantage of this property.”

A long pause stretched out while Yatagarasu drew something much more complicated than lines and kanji. A figure with a large dress, floating sleeves, a large bow on her head– Reimu. He was drawing Reimu.

He then scratched in a box below Reimu, one that looked suspiciously like her donation box. “The first technique is a method of storage. The way this transitive property works is through leaving a metaphorical mark on your meta-physical soul. Some loopers were adept in the use of an extra-dimensional storage space, and after experimenting with this transitive property they found that you could also store objects in this meta-physical soul. This was then further developed into something they called the Pocket, a storage medium that all loopers have access to.”

“All loopers?” Reimu asked. “Even the new ones?”

Yatagarasu nodded. “All of them, yes. However, for younger loopers, it might not be as useful as you might assume, as the size of the pocket directly correlates with the power of your soul. I suspect that you, Hakurei, will have a fairly large pocket once you’re taught how to perform this technique. Large for a young looper, I should say.”

Eventually? “You can’t teach me?”

Yatagarasu shook his head. “No, I cannot. It is a looper derived technique that’s wholly unique to loopers. I am not a looper and am incapable of the technique. Thus, I cannot teach you the technique, either. However, I can instead arrange for someone to teach you this technique.”

Reimu hummed in response. “Can I ask about who you want to teach this to me?”

Yatagarasu - well, ‘hummed’ isn’t correct, but they made that rumbling noise again in the same way one would hum. “I don’t want to make any promises now, as I’d want to review the places I can send you to. One option I think would be a good choice now is a fantastical world called Dreamland, but I’d much rather review all my options before saying that the choice is made.”

Dreamland, huh? Sounds like something Doremy would investigate. “I see. Thank you, still.”

“It’s no issue at all. They will likely also teach you the second technique, as well, which is a method of communication. The first seven branches were gaining loopers at a slow yet steady

rate, and the older loopers wanted a method of quickly discerning loopers from non-loopers that all loopers would have access to. They eventually came up with something they called the Ping, a technique where you have your Pocket resonate with the Pockets of other loopers. I've heard the feeling of the Ping compared to the ringing of a bell, or a plucked string. Unfortunately, I can't teach you this technique, either, but the same people who can teach you the pocket can also teach you the Ping. Am I still making sense, so far?"

So far, "yes."

"Excellent. Now, earlier I said that you would almost always have access to powers and abilities you pick up from previous loops. That 'almost' is important. Occasionally, you will be unable to call upon the powers you gained from prior loops. I gave the example of breathing fire as it is something that you do not have the natural ability to do. These 'Null Loops,' as they're called, happen for a variety of reasons. The two most common are processing power and consistency. Yggdrasil might need to shut off these looper abilities to dedicate more power to something else. Alternatively, Yggdrasil wants to run a loop without interference from anything besides the variables it chooses. These two reasons correlate directly to Null loops often happening after the previous loop crashes."

"You mentioned those earlier," Reimu remembered. "Are they bad? How much of an impact do they have?"

"Overall?" Yatagarasu made a clicking noise, mulling over his answer. "Less than you might think, but still best avoided. Every little bit matters, after all. Usually, crashing a loop only means that I have to read over a report of what happened afterwards. In rarer cases I would also have to tell you not to do what you did to cause the report to be filed in the first place."

"Now, that 'usually' is important. Recently there was… a bigger crash. An… accident, on our part. An activation attempt, I believe, that blew a branch out of existence. As a result, dozens if not hundreds of other branches activated in an attempt to stabilize Yggdrasil. Yours is one of many, and I am the… I am the Administrator in charge of your branch."

He didn't sound sure of himself, but Reimu decided not to comment on that.

"Strictly speaking, my role as an Administrator is only to repair your branch. I have a station for that, outside of your world. I wanted to step in and explain what I need you to do as an

Anchor and…" Yatagarasu trailed off, hanging his head in shame. "I also wanted to apologize."

What?

"When I was first assigned to work on your branch, I had failed to notice that you had already been activated as the Anchor. As a result, you spent far, far longer than you should have being all alone in a branch that should have been filled with life. For that, I deeply apologize."

Reimu was stunned. Here she was, faced with the first apology, real apology, not just niceties, that she'd received… ever, really. And from a *god* , of all things. A *powerful* god, one that by all rights should have been an insufferably arrogant being that had the idea that they owed nothing to anyone.

As if he wanted to blow her expectations out of the river even further, Yatagarasu bowed even lower, almost digging its beak into the ground, "Alas, I cannot fix the mistakes of the past. All I can do now is try to make up for my negligence. I've activated a few companions for you, four total, and more are to follow."

"I - Raise your head. *Please* ." Reimu was two steps away from losing her head and writing all of this off as a post-festival hallucination. Last time she felt like this… No, best not to think about that. "You don't need to apologize to me. Just this was enough. You did the best you could, and - you're right that an apology isn't enough for the past, but the now is now, and you've changed the now for the better. Now I have…"

Reimu trailed off, suddenly remembering what Yatagarasu had said. "I have… four?" Marisa and Alice were two, of course, but then, who were the other two? Yukari? Shinki?

Thankfully, Yatagarasu raised his head, and cawed out a response. "You do. Ah… Regretfully, I don't recall their names right now, and I would need my station if I wanted to search for them again."

Reimu was stunned, again, but in the complete opposite direction. It seemed that even divine birds still had the brains of a bird, sometimes.

She shook her head. “I'll find out the other two later. You were saying, about crashes?”

“Ah, yes. One moment, please.” Yatagarasu then flew to the bottom of the drawn Yggdrasil, once again disturbing nothing other than Reimu’s intuition.

“When a loop ends prematurely, we call it a Crash. Loops could crash for a variety of reasons, most commonly being the Anchor – or Anchors, multiple, if it’s a fused loop – being rendered unable to Anchor the loop. This usually means dying, with the exceptions being loops with some form of an afterlife where it’s more difficult to lose one’s ability to Anchor a loop.”

“Where does Gensokyo fall under?” Reimu asked. “There’s many places for the dead, here, and even the dead have trouble staying dead.”

“I am not sure,” Yatagarasu admitted. “Likely the second, but I would rather not find out.”

Reimu chuckled. “I think it’s inevitable, but I’ll try my best.”

Historically, in most loops, the previous Hakurei Shrine Maidens didn’t retire by choice. Reimu hasn’t died yet, but if she had all of eternity ahead of her then it really was just a matter of time before someone got lucky.

Then, a thought occurred to Reimu. “Why does it matter if the loop ends early? The loop has to end anyways, right? You might as well be trying to use a jar of oil to stop rain.”

Marisa would probably find a way to do that, actually. Maybe magical oil, or maybe as an ingredient with something else.

“It matters, because… Hmm…” Yatagarasu paused, mulling over his answer with a dull rumble.

Finally, he looked up at Reimu. “Are you aware of how the water cycle works? Rain falls to the ground, which collects into rivers and lakes, then the water in the rivers and lakes turn back into the clouds that form the rain.”

“Imagine you tried to collect the rain before it fell to the ground to turn it back into a cloud. Is it possible? Certainly, but it requires a great deal more effort than letting things happen naturally.”

Yatagarsu extended a wing towards Yggdrasil. “The same concept applies here. Time wants to move forward, much like how water wants to move downwards. To move water upwards requires a great deal of energy, best saved for when the water can no longer move down, as it does in a lake that sits beneath the rising sun.”

Reimu nodded. It made sense, and was also why she didn’t preemptively stop incidents from happening. Less effort required to fix what happened afterwards, except for the first one where her shrine gets destroyed for no good reason. “Forgive me for asking so many questions.”

Yatagarasu laughed in response. “It’s alright. Ama- One of my superiors, who was responsible for most of my training, says that asking questions means that you’re taking things seriously, as you should. So, according to her, and I would agree with her, it’s good that you’re asking questions.”

“Returning to our original line of discussion, another common reason for crashes is when the loopers do something that causes Yggdrasil to prematurely end the loop itself. This something is most commonly something that triggers one of Yggdrasil’s safety checks, such as a sudden demand for more power than Yggdrasil was expecting to have to use, So, rather than addressing the power spike with the appropriate amount of power distribution, it instead terminates the loop.”

Reimu nodded. It made sense; Marisa had similar systems in place for her bigger spells, though usually her safety checks don’t end a world’s existence.

Though, now that Reimu thought about it, Marisa making a spell that could end worlds as a side effect was a distinct possibility now.

Reimu decided to voice her concerns now rather than later. “So, what do I have to do as an Anchor? Exterminate troublemakers?”

“Do?” Yatagarsu considered his answer, then rumbled. “Nothing you don’t already do, considering your baseline. Exist. Stay alive. Most anchors try to keep the loop from crashing by stopping those who would end the world, or the universe, or anything in-between depending on the scale. Some try to assist their fellow loopers in their endeavors, since the Anchor is not the only one who has to be stable. It’s your choice.”

“Though, there is one thing.” Yatagarasu hopped forward, close enough that Reimu could touch him if she leaned down. “I’ve noticed that you’ve been staring at my plumage for some time now. You may touch it, if you wish. I trust that you know how to be gentle?”

Luckily for Reimu, yes, she did.

Compiler’s Commentary

1.0: you know considering the last snip this intro was kind of unnecessary huh

1.1: Welcome to the Loops, Reimu Hakurei. Leave your sanity at the door.

1.2: You get two, two, TWO COMMENTS FOR THE PRICE OF ONE!!!

A: For the record, Shinki’s not looping – but she’s powerful enough to know something’s up with time. At least this loop, Yggdrasil doesn’t know if she is for realsies! It’s making a lot of shit up as it goes along!

B: *Technically* , since the first Touhou snip was posted in 2014, the timeline should only go up to ISC at best. But since the Touhou loops have been a huge indecipherable mess for like eight years, we all collectively went “fuck it” and decided on HSiFS as the starting point.

1.3: *Oh shit she left her sanity at the door.*

1.4: What was more shocking to Reimu? Marisa joining Reimu in the time loop, or Marisa being willing to pull out an unwinnable spellcard in a duel with the person who is in the most prime position to punish you for breaking the spellcard rules?

1.5: Templates like that are forbidden – fortunately, it’s not quite a template like that.

1.6: I’m sure this is completely healthy and definitely won’t give them radiation poisoning!

1.7: Hello, dolly!

1.8: “And then there was that one bizarre loop where Patchouli was specifically trying to assassinate me…”

1.9: I am *unreasonably* happy with that title.

1.10: I’d make a joke about how Alice can’t enchant rocks because that’s Keiki’s territory, but at this point in the timeline the Tree hasn’t remembered Keiki *exists* yet…

1.11: Blue Reimu is lowkey more aesthetically pleasing to me than Regular Red Reimu.

1.12: Alice is going to be overjoyed when she learns her Pocket’s going to get big enough for a spare workshop. Or two. Or fifty billion. With room for storage.

1.13: Yatagarasu AKA “Yaggy’s” biggest secret? He has no idea what he’s doing and he’s just been assigned to a branch held together by duct tape and happy thoughts. *Good luck~*

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